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ABSTRACT

This unit examines the responsibilities of being a U.S. citizen. It surveys the need for the participation of all citizens in the governing of the United States. Lessons explain that while the United States Constitution does not require the people of the United States to be good citizens, citizens need to work hard in order to stay free. The unit argues that, for U.S. citizens, the idea of freedom necessitates: voting for the candidates they support; serving on juries; opposing unfair public policies; and advocating policies they believe are good for the country. The unit teaches students that citizens also should participate in private service. Suggestions for active private service include: helping neighbors; volunteering time, money, and energy to help the country; and knowing about events in the community and the nation. The unit contains an introduction and four sections focusing on the following topics: (1) "You Can Fight City Hall"; (2) "Sharing Equally the Blessing of Liberty"; (3) "Can We Be Required To Be Good Citizens?"; and (4) "I'd Rather Do It Myself." Each of the five sections contains vocabulary lists, questions to think about, and questions for discussion. (LH)

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# THE CONSTITUTION...
## The words we live by

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SW 026 217

Being An American:
## Citizenship and the Constitution Today
A Discussion Program
Abridged Unit Four

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### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

**Herman Belz**
University of Maryland

**A.E. Howard**
University of Virginia

**Leonard P. Oliver**
Oliver Associates

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American Association of Adult & Continuing Education

**Howard Sahm**
American Association of Adult & Continuing Education

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U.S. Army (Ret.)

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Consultant

**Nancy Peavy**
National Council On the Aging, Inc.

**Norma Tucker**
Dundalk Community College

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**Allene Grognet**
Center for Applied Linguistics

**Sylvia G. McCollum**
U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Prisons

**Carroll Towey**
Division of Adult Education & Literacy
U.S. Department of Education

**Elaine Shelton**
American Association of Adult & Continuing Education

### TECHNICAL STAFF:

**William Kelley, DUAL & Assoc.**
Project Director

**Robert S. Peck, American Bar Association**
Co-Program Manager

**Howard Harris, Corporate Response Group**
Co-Program Manager

**Sharon P. Dawson, DUAL & Assoc.**
Editorial & Production

**Nancy Goudreau**
American Association of Adult & Continuing Education

**Stephen Thurston**
Writer

**Richard Long**
American Association of Adult & Continuing Education

**Sylvia Riggs Liroff**
National Council On the Aging, Inc.

**Deborah Short**
Center for Applied Linguistics

**Miriam Burt**
Center for Applied Linguistics

**Anita Congress**
Writer

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# THE CONSTITUTION:
# Let's Talk About It

## Abridged Unit 4

# Being An American: Citizenship and the Constitution Today

THE COMMISSION ON THE BICENTENNIAL
OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

808 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) USA-1787

# PREFACE

As Americans, we define ourselves by our two most important documents, the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States*. These documents describe what it means to be an American. Together, these documents speak about our *rights* and *responsibilities* as Americans.

Each American can share these documents. We are a country of people who have come from many different cultures and from many different countries. We, or our parents or grandparents, speak and have spoken many different languages. We follow many different religions. These documents tell us who we are and what it means to be an American.

Chief Justice Warren E. Burger said that the Declaration of Independence was the *promise* given to future Americans by our Founding Fathers; the Constitution was the *fulfillment* of that promise.

This unit looks at *citizenship*. It examines the need for the *participation* of all citizens in the governing of the United States. All American citizens need to keep their rights and privileges safe by performing their duties and responsibilities to their country. This unit should help students think and talk about their role as citizens of the United States and of the world.

# INTRODUCTION

## Theme

The American tradition is government *of*, *by*, and *for* the people. This gives the American citizen the opportunity to enjoy a great amount of freedom. But, it also places a great amount of responsibility on the citizen. This unit will talk about the responsibilities of being an American citizen.

## Vocabulary

**to advocate** - to speak in favor of, or for something, to support.

**opportunity** - a favorable or good possibility, a chance (to do or be something).

**quality** - something typical of a person or persons, a characteristic.

**to volunteer** - to offer services or help for free, without payment.

## Think About

— *Are American citizens required to vote in national elections?*

— *What responsibilities does an American citizen have?*

## The Idea of Freedom

Americans come from many different countries. The quality that makes a person an American is not his or her nationality. A religious leader from the 19th century gave a name to this quality that Americans have. He called it *"the idea of freedom."*

*America has attracted immigrants from many countries for centuries. The nationality of a person does not make him or her an American. To be an American means to support a democracy--a government of, by and for all the people.*

The idea of freedom means that the American citizen must work hard to stay free. Citizens must support a democracy--a government *of*, *by*, and *for* all the people. The idea of freedom means people should do the following as public service:

— Vote for the candidates they support,

— Serve on juries or in community groups,

— Oppose unfair public policies, and

— Advocate policies they believe are good for the country.

Citizens should also participate in private service. They can do the following:

— Help their neighbors,

— Volunteer time, money, and energy to help the country, and

— Know about events in the community and the nation.

When John F. Kennedy became President in January 1961, he said in his inaugural speech:

*"Ask not what your country can do for you,*
*ask what you can do for your country."*

It is necessary that all Americans participate in the self-government of the United States. This is the only way we can be certain that we will keep the country free.

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This unit will discuss four topics on the subject of citizenship. These topics are:

1. You Can Fight City Hall,
2. Sharing Equally the Blessings of Liberty,
3. Can We Be Required to be Good Citizens?, and
4. I'd Rather Do it Myself.

# 1 YOU CAN FIGHT CITY HALL

## Topic Theme

When the government acts or makes laws and policies that people think are unfair, it is the responsibility of the people to inform the government. When it is a city policy, people must write to their city council members and to the mayor. When it is a state policy, people must write to their state legislators and to the governor. When it is a federal policy, people must write to their representatives in Congress and to the President. It is possible to change a decision by the government.

## Vocabulary

**granite** - a hard rock; it is often used for building roads.

**geological survey** - a record of the composition of the land.

**legislator** - a person who is elected by the people to make laws.

**nuclear reactor** - a large machine used to produce atomic energy.

**nuclear waste** - the dangerous material that remains after atomic energy is used to create electricity.

**nuclear waste dump site** - the place where the nuclear waste is stored.

**radioactive material** - a dangerous, harmful substance. One type is used to make nuclear energy. Another type is a result of making nuclear energy.

**site** - a place or location.

## Think About

— *Do you think the world should use nuclear energy? Why, or why not?*

— *Sometimes two rights conflict. For example, cities have the right to burn trash, but people have the right to clean air. How can we decide which right is more important?*

## You Can Fight City Hall

In 1982 Congress passed a law. It said the U.S. Department of Energy had to choose sites to store nuclear waste. The waste was very radioactive.

Some parts of the state of New Hampshire have a lot of granite. Radioactive waste can be stored in granite. For this reason, the government chose a rural town in New Hampshire as a possible nuclear waste dump site. This town was Hillsborough.

The people of Hillsborough did not want their town to have a nuclear waste dump. People began talking to one another. They planned a community meeting. At the meeting the people decided:

— To write to their Congressional Representatives and Senators to protest this decision,

— To write to the governor and the state legislators to ask for help,

— To make a geological survey (The purpose of this survey was to prove that the land in Hillsborough was not suitable for a waste dump site), and

— To drive more than 300 tractor-trailer trucks to Concord, the state capital of New Hampshire.

The people did all of this to show their opposition to the dump.

*One of the most important ways of changing governmental policies is through communicating directly with your elected officials. Writing to your senator, congressman, state legislator, city council member, president, mayor, or governor, is a first step in the process.*

## Meeting with Government Officials

Department of Energy officials met in New Hampshire to obtain the people's opinions about this dump site. The citizens of Hillsborough went to this meeting. Two things happened that changed the government's decision:

— The geological survey showed that the granite in Hillsborough was not suitable for a dump site.

— The Congressmen from New Hampshire put pressure on the Department of Energy not to build the dump site there.

In the end, the Department of Energy decided not to put the dump site in Hillsborough.

---

## For Discussion

— *In what ways can you inform your elected representatives about your position on issues?*

## Conclusion

When the citizens of Hillsborough, New Hampshire, organized themselves they were able to change the government's policy. They used only legal means. They used only constitutional means. They were successful.

# 2 SHARING EQUALLY THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY

## Topic Theme

When citizens work together, they can stop the government from doing things that they do not believe are good for them. The people of Hillsborough proved this. The people of the United States must work together. The story of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is another example of the strength of the people. People can work together to make changes through the system.

## Vocabulary

**to assemble** - to gather or collect together; people assemble together for a march or a demonstration.

**ballot form** - a sheet of paper with the names of the candidates for the election listed; it is used to make a secret vote.

**to demonstrate** - to participate in a public show of opinions or feelings.

**election district** - a section of a city, county, or state that is officially divided for the election of candidates from that area.

**to guarantee** - to promise.

**march** - a demonstration where people walk together from one place to another to show their feelings about an issue; a parade.

**tear gas** - a chemical gas that the police use in demonstrations. This gas causes temporary blindness.

## Think About

— *Do all citizens of the United States have the same rights today?*

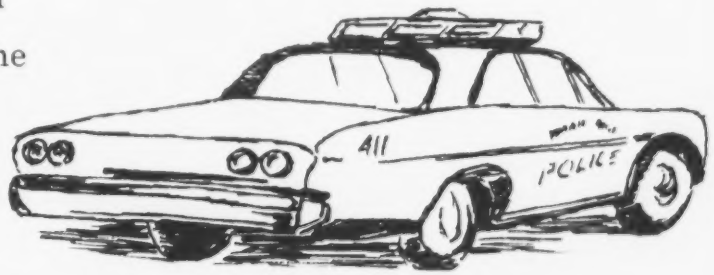
— *Why was it necessary for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead a famous march in 1965?*

— *Do you think that most American citizens vote in local, state, and federal elections? Why, or why not?*

## To Make Our World a Better Place

On March 6, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led 500 African-Americans on a march in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. These citizens were marching to demonstrate the need for a new voting rights law. They wanted a law that would let them use their constitutional right to vote.

On this date, the state police of Alabama stopped Dr. King and the other marchers. The next time, Dr. King and 2,000 marchers set out to reach Montgomery. The police attacked the marchers with tear gas and heavy sticks. Many of the marchers were hurt. President Lyndon Johnson saw this attack on television.




*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a march to protest discrimination. Although the marchers were attacked and injured, they eventually won their constitutional rights.*

President Johnson went to Congress and told the Senators and Representatives that the marchers were right. Because they were Americans, they had the same rights as other white Americans. Alabama and other states were wrong when they made laws to keep African-Americans from voting. The President then sent Congress a bill to guarantee the rights of blacks to vote.

Next, the President sent 4,000 Army troops to Alabama, and he ordered the Alabama National Guard to protect the Selma marchers. When the marchers reached Montgomery, they had 40,000 participants!

Congress passed President Johnson's bill, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Johnson signed the bill, and it became a law.

## The 15th Amendment

This Voting Rights Act of 1965 was not the first law about voting in the United States. Our Constitution has several amendments about voting rights. The first important amendment for voting rights was the **15th Amendment**.

In 1870, Congress passed the **15th Amendment**. This amendment gave all male citizens the right to vote. The race, color, or status of the citizen made no difference. Every male citizen had the right to vote.

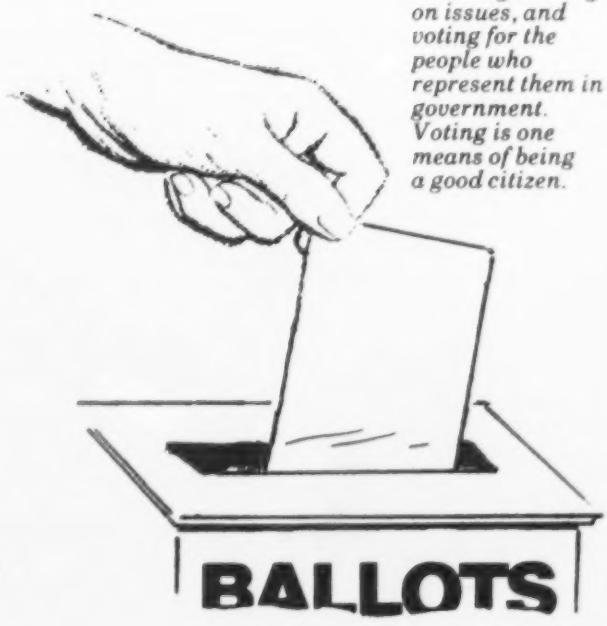
*Still, how did some states keep the African-Americans from voting?*

— They changed the boundaries of election districts. In this way, African-Americans could not have a majority vote in any district.

— They changed the ballot form. Many African-Americans could not understand this new ballot form so they could not vote.

— They changed rules that defined the qualifications for candidates. After this, African-Americans could not run for office.

## Other Amendments About Voting




*One means by which Americans express their will is through voting on issues, and voting for the people who represent them in government. Voting is one means of being a good citizen.*

In addition to the **15th Amendment**, there are four other voting rights amendments to the Constitution.

— The **17th Amendment** (1913): *This amendment said senators would be elected by popular vote.*

— The **19th Amendment** (1920): *This amendment gave women the right to vote in national elections.*

— The **23rd Amendment** (1961): *This amendment gave people who live in the District of Columbia the right to vote.*

— The **26th Amendment** (1971): *This amendment gave people who are 18 years old or older the right to vote.*

## Some Citizens Do Not Vote

Today, only half of the people who can vote, do vote. Why is this? There are many possible reasons:

— People are satisfied with the way things are. They do not feel that they need to vote.

— People are not satisfied at all, but they think they cannot do anything to change the government.

— People do not feel connected to any community because they move frequently. Because of this, they do not feel it is necessary to participate in the community.

— Television brings the news quickly and directly to people's homes. Many Americans feel isolated from their community. Community involvement has become less important to citizens.

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## For Discussion

— *If you are from another country, do most of the people in your country vote in elections? Why, or why not?*

— *Why do <u>you</u> think that the majority of Americans do not vote?*

## Conclusion

The important point to remember is that in a democracy it is not the majority who rule. It is the majority of those *who vote* and *who participate in the government* who rule.

# 3 CAN WE BE REQUIRED TO BE GOOD CITIZENS?

## Topic Theme

The United States Constitution does not require its citizens to vote. Nothing requires the people of the United States to be good citizens. If we do not want to participate in governing our communities, our states, and our country, we will be the losers. Our government will not represent us; it will only represent the people who participate in the government.

## Vocabulary

**conscience** - a sense inside of a person that tells him/her what is right and what is wrong.

**to expel** - to dismiss someone officially from school or an organization.

**loyalty** - the quality of being true to a friend, or a country, or an organization.

**patriotism** - the quality of being proud of one's country and loyal to it.

**to salute** - to greet or show honor to someone or something, either with words or with hand signals.

**subversive** - ideas or actions that might cause the destruction of the government.

## Think About

— *How could the government encourage more people to vote?*

— *Do you think it is more important for people to do what their religion says to do, or to do what the government says to do?*

— *Can you think of a situation in which a person's religion might say the opposite of the government?*

## Can We Be Required to Be Good Citizens?

In the past there have been times when citizens have had to take loyalty tests. This has usually happened during wars or during times of crisis. In the 1950s, many Americans were worried about the spread of international communism. Some Americans feared communists were working in the government. At that time, people who belonged to communist organizations or spent a lot of time with members of these organizations were not always able to get certain jobs. The government was trying to balance national security against individual rights.

## The 1st Amendment Protects Our Rights

The **1st Amendment** continues to protect the rights of people in the United States.

For example, in 1967, the Supreme Court said that a public employee could not be fired for not being loyal to the government unless he or she is an active member of a subversive organization. This person must know that the organization he or she belongs to is subversive.

Another example from recent history involves the American flag. The flag is the most respected and honored symbol of the United States, but it is not possible to require that all Americans salute the flag.

*People cannot be forced to take actions which violate their religious beliefs. Even saluting the American flag is against some religions. The Bill of Rights protects the freedom of religion as one of our most precious rights.*

In 1935, three students in Minersville, Pennsylvania, were expelled because they refused to salute the flag at school. They were Jehovah's Witnesses. They said it was against their religion to salute the flag. The Supreme Court did not agree. It said that their religion did not allow them to avoid their "political responsibilities," and they had to salute the flag.

Three years later there was another case before the Supreme Court concerning Jehovah's Witness' children from West Virginia. Two new justices were on the Supreme Court. This time the Supreme Court said that the children could not be forced to salute the flag. This court also reversed the decision of the children in Pennsylvania. The court said that *personal conscience* was more important than the responsibilities of a good citizen.

## Learning to be a Good Citizen

Where can Americans learn about their rights and responsibilities as good citizens? In the past few decades, fewer and fewer citizens have voted or participated in civic activities.

In the past, American schools were very involved in teaching about civic participation.

*Schools are one place where Americans can learn about their rights and responsibilities, and what it means to be a good citizen.*

But, in later decades, civic responsibility was not emphasized very much. Schools today need to teach more about civic responsibility through an emphasis on history, government, and geography.

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## For Discussion

— *In 1989 and 1990, the Supreme Court said that a citizen has a right to burn the flag of the United States. The Court said that this conduct is protected by the* **1st Amendment**. *What is your opinion of this decision?*

## Conclusion

Civic responsibility is not the same thing as patriotism. Civic responsibility is the understanding and participation of all citizens in the public affairs of the nation. Schools must emphasize civic knowledge in their classes. Other community organizations and groups must also work to emphasize civic responsibility as the most important duty of the American citizen.

# 4 I'D RATHER DO IT MYSELF

## Topic Theme

Americans have worked as volunteers for years. In the 1830s, a French writer named Alexis de Tocqueville explained what an American citizen did if he wanted to change something, or if there was a problem in the local community. Tocqueville said that the American citizen talked to his neighbor, they formed a committee, and then the committee worked on the problem. Tocqueville said:

> *"...the health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens."*

## Vocabulary

**to donate** - to give something to someone or to some organization for a good purpose.

**to recycle** - to save and re-use materials such as cans, bottles, and newspapers.

**wilderness** - a large area of land with little or no sign of human life.

**wildlife** - animals and plants that live and grow in the wilderness.

## Think About

— *What kinds of activities do volunteers do in America?*

— *Do you think it is good to volunteer in the community? Why, or why not?*

## I'd Rather Do It Myself

Citizens do a lot of good things. They often do these things without the help of the government. Some of the citizens who have done good things for the country are:

*Americans do not look to their government to do everything. Many private citizens would prefer to undertake activities without the help of government. They feel that they can do it better and cheaper than the government can.*

— William Rutherford. When he was 73 years old, Mr. Rutherford was worried that the United States was losing its wilderness. He and other citizens of northern Illinois worked to establish a wildlife park. Private citizens and private organizations donated money for the park.

— Richard McDonough. Mr. McDonough started a program called *Hotels/Motels in Partnership.* This program arranges for free rooms in hotels and motels for people who need help. It helps homeless people and victims of fires, hurricanes, and other disasters.

— Helen Palit. Ms. Palit is the Executive Director of *City Harvest*, an organization in New York. It collects extra food from markets, restaurants, stores, and offices. It distributes this food to soup

kitchens and shelters in New York. Private citizens and organizations pay for the program.

— Shalid Watson. Mr. Watson is from New Jersey. He started the *Grassroots Movement*. This organization fights against drug dealers. Citizens work in their own neighborhoods to fight against drugs.

— Edward Castor. Mr. Castor taught himself to read when he was 40 years old. He now travels in his state of Indiana giving speeches on literacy. He is also a volunteer who teaches other adults how to read.

— Carolyn Jackson. Ms. Jackson started a program that uses horseback riding to help children with muscle problems. In Delaware, Ms. Jackson donates her own time to supervise 20 people who volunteer in this program.

— Aja Henderson. Ms. Henderson is only 15 years old. She started a library in her home in Louisiana. The purpose of her library is to let more children read books. Her library is open all year long.

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## For Discussion

— *What kinds of activities should people do as volunteers?*

— *What kinds of activities require the help of the government?*

## Conclusion

Many people in the United States do volunteer work to help the community. These volunteers do a lot of good. As President George Bush said in June 1989:

> *"There is no problem in America that is not being solved somewhere...You each have a gift that America needs, and I'm asking you to give that gift now."*

# UNIT CONCLUSION

Harry Truman was President from 1945 to 1953. Just before he left office, a newspaper reporter asked him what he was planning to do, now that he was leaving the highest office in the country. President Truman told the reporter that he was *not leaving* the highest office in the country. He said he was *going to* be working at the highest office in the country. He was going to be a citizen.

The highest office in the United States *is* the office of citizen. Our government depends on citizens:

— To vote,

— To know about national issues by reading the newspaper and watching the news, and

— To participate in the community by volunteering and working within the system to correct problems.

How, then, can you be a good citizen? Follow three basic steps:

— First, learn about the nation's guiding principles and values.

— Next, share this knowledge with others.

— Finally, actively participate in the life of your community, your state, and your country.

Remember that citizenship is not a sport for people to watch, but a sport in which everyone participates on the team. When you perform your *responsibilities* as citizens of the United States, you are making sure that you will always have your *rights* as citizens of the United States.

## HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT DATES

| | |
|---|---|
| 1215 | Magna Carta |
| 1258 | Establishment of English Parliament |
| 1607 | First English settlement in America (Jamestown) |
| 1619 | First colonial legislative assembly (Williamsburg) |
| 1620 | Pilgrims settle at Plymouth |
| 1628 | English Petition of Right |
| 1649 | Execution of King Charles I |
| 1653-60 | Protectorate rules England |
| 1660 | English monarchy restored |
| 1688-89 | Glorious Revolution and Revolution Settlement |
| 1689 | English Bill of Rights; English Toleration Act |
| 1754-63 | French-Indian War |
| 1765 | Stamp Act and Quartering Act |
| 1770 | Boston Massacre |
| 1773 | Tea Act and Boston Tea Party |
| 1774 | Intolerable Acts; First Continental Congress |
| 1775 | Battles of Lexington and Concord; Second Continental Congress |
| 1776 | Declaration of Independence |
| 1780 | Massachusetts state constitution |
| 1781 | Ratification of the Articles of Confederation |
| 1786 | Annapolis Convention |
| 1787 | Philadelphia Convention |
| 1787-88 | Publication of *The Federalist* |
| 1788 | Ratification of Constitution |
| 1789 | First Congress; George Washington elected president; Judiciary Act |
| 1791 | Ratification of the Bill of Rights |
| 1796 | John Adams elected president |
| 1800 | Thomas Jefferson elected president |
| 1803 | *Marbury v. Madison* |
| 1820 | Missouri Compromise |
| 1846-48 | War with Mexico |
| 1848 | First women's rights convention |
| 1857 | *Dred Scott v. Sanford* |
| 1860 | Abraham Lincoln elected president |
| 1861-65 | Civil War |
| 1863 | Lincoln issues *Emancipation Proclamation; Prize Cases* |
| 1865 | Ratification of 13th Amendment |
| 1868 | Ratification of 14th Amendment |
| 1870 | Ratification of 15th Amendment |
| 1890 | National American Woman Suffrage Association |
| 1896 | *Plessy v. Ferguson* |
| 1917 | U.S. enters World War I |
| 1920 | Ratification of 19th Amendment |
| 1929 | Stock Market crash |
| 1932 | Franklin D. Roosevelt elected president |
| 1941-45 | World War II |
| 1954 | *Brown v. Board of Education* |
| 1964 | Civil Rights Act; Ratification of 24th Amendment |
| 1965 | Voting Rights Act |
| 1968 | Equal Employment Opportunities Act |
| 1971 | Ratification of the 26th Amendment |
| 1972 | *Wisconsin v. Yoder* |
| 1973 | War Powers Act |

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808 Seventeenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (202) USA-1787

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*The Bicentennial has focused on the following themes: drafting and signing of the Constitution (1787), ratification of the Constitution (1788), establishment of the Executive and Legislative branches of government (1789), establishment of the Judiciary (1789), the "Bill of Rights and Beyond" (1791).*

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